



**THE ROLE OF PROVERBS IN FORMING INTERCULTURAL
AWARENESS (ON THE BASIS OF TEACHING ENGLISH,
GEORGIAN AND TURKISH LANGUAGES) –
Ph. D. THESIS REVIEWⁱ FOR: HALİS GÖZPINAR**

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It is indeed with much pleasure and considerable excitement that I submit this highly positive review of Halis Gözpınar's magisterial dissertation *The Role of Proverbs in Forming Intercultural Awareness (On the Basis of Teaching English, Georgian and Turkish Languages)* that he has submitted to the Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences at Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University in distant Georgia. I have shown his work to two of my colleagues in the Faculty of Education here at the University of Vermont, and I am happy to report that they are deeply impressed with this scholarly achievement, and they join me in my laudatory evaluation that is to follow here.

It has been my privilege to be well acquainted with Halis Gözpınar's work for several years. In fact, I am proud to say that I possess and have read his M.A. thesis on *Proverb – Its Semantic and Didactic Parametres* (Tbilisi State University 2011) as well as the following five articles:

Gözpınar, Halis. "Use of Proverbs in Political Discourse by US President Barack Obama and Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan." *The Criterion: An International Journal of English*, 4, no. 5 (2013), 1-9.

Gözpınar, Halis. "Turkish-Georgian Equivalent Proverbs and Turkish Loan-Words in Georgian Language." *Karadeniz*, 6, no. 21 (2014), 116-126.

Gözpınar, Halis. "English Teachers' Interest in Proverbs in Language Teaching." *Journal of International Social Research*, 7, no. 31 (2014), 611-617.

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Rusieshvili-Cartledge, Manana, and Halis Gözpinar. "Similar and Unique in the Family: How to Raise Children (Using Examples of Turkish and Georgian Proverbs Relating to Children)." *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 18, no. 1 (2014), 67-77.

Gözpinar, Halis. "Comparative linguistic and cultural corpus of English and Turkish proverbs interrelated in children." *Modern Journal of Language Teaching Methods*, 6, no. 9 (2016), p 324,- 330.

These studies are invaluable additions to my International Proverb Archives, and I have so much enjoyed observing Halis Gözpinar develop into a paremiological scholar. It has also been a special experience to correspond with him from time to time about his work. So I can honestly state that I had been looking forward to his Ph.D. dissertation with much anticipation. Now that I have finished studying it, I can congratulate him and his supervisor Prof. Izabella Petriashvili on an excellent dissertation. It is without any doubt a major scholarly contribution that will have considerable influence on future research relating to the intercultural awareness and teaching of proverbs. I should also stress that it is especially valuable that Halis Gözpinar compares Georgian, Turkish, and English proverbs. Georgian and Turkish proverbs are not particularly well known in English-speaking countries, and all of this comparative material presents new insights into the worldview of these two important cultures.

The first chapter on "English Language and Proverbs" (pp. 14-32) deals with the importance of the English language as the *lingua franca* of the world and explains that teachers of English as a foreign language need to be aware of the importance of also knowing and teaching the proverbs of that important language. Here Gözpinar shows that he is well versed in the theoretical considerations of language competence and in particular communicative competence in a foreign language that includes a certain cultural awareness. Of course, the author also deals with the definition problems of proverbs, and it is noteworthy that he includes a list of meta-proverbs (p. 23) in which the folk states proverbially what constitutes a proverb. He also discusses theoretical aspects of the use and function of proverbs in the oral or written communicative process. Naturally he also deals with the metaphors of proverbs, explaining that while proverbs from different cultures might mean the same they might well employ different metaphors resulting in translation difficulties. There is no doubt that Halis Gözpinar makes clear that the ubiquitous proverbs are by no means simple in their actual use due to their complex polysituativity, polyfunctionality, and polysemanticity. Little wonder then that teachers of English as a second language must be made aware of the importance, relevance, and usefulness of proverbs for language learners.

In the second chapter on "The Role of Proverbs in Forming Cultural Awareness" (pp. 33-4) Gözpinar uses the appropriate metaphor that "proverbs are sometimes like

an iceberg because what is visible above the water is just a small piece of a much larger whole” (p. 34). He is absolutely correct in pointing out that proverbs incorporate many elements of culture, folklore, and worldview (psychology) that make it so difficult and challenging for teachers to acquaint their students with these incredibly important communicative devices, especially since most foreign language teachers have not been made aware of the importance of proverbs in their own culture or in the culture of another target language. As Halis Gözpinar points out, he is an experienced foreign language teacher (see p. 41), and it is exactly his years of teaching experience that puts his theoretical work on solid pragmatic footing. A Ph.D. student without having been a teacher would have had difficulty writing this thesis, and I applaud Halis Gözpinar for sharing his insights based on actual field work with not only other teachers but the scholarly world of paremiologists as well. He is, of course, also correct in pointing out that while students might be quite eager to learn proverbs in the foreign language, teachers quite often are reluctant to do so because they do not possess the language proficiency or confidence to deal with proverbial matters in the classroom (see p. 42). The teachers need instruction, and they also are in need of effective teaching methods to make proverbs accessible to their students. Increasing proverbial competency among teachers is doubtlessly an important step in order to integrate the learning and use of proverbs in the classroom.

With the third chapter on “English, Georgian and Turkish Proverbs about Children and Their Role in Child Development” (pp. 45-3) Halis Gözpinar presents a fascinating comparative linguistic and cultural corpus of proverbs that are all interrelated in content, i.e., dealing with the psychological and educational development of children in three cultural environments. This rich material is presented in the three languages with helpful translations for the Georgian and Turkish proverbs being provided as well. It is here where the author includes significant analyses of the semantics and pragmatics of these proverbs by developing 10 semantic models for a total of 116 proverbs about children (English-56, Turkish-30, and Georgian 30). Some of the themes include that children are valuable, that parents play a key role in the children’s development, that children are indebted to their parents, that raising children is hard, that education helps the character development of children, etc. I so much enjoyed reading these semantic, cultural, pragmatic, psychological, and educational deliberations, especially since I became much better acquainted with Georgian and Turkish proverbial treasures. Of course, Halis Gözpinar explains convincingly that there are at times almost perfect equivalencies among the three languages, but more often than not the metaphors differ greatly while the meaning is very much the same. I particularly enjoyed his analysis of the Turkish proverb “The pear does not fall far from the tree”, the Georgian proverb “Apple falls from the apple tree” and the English “The

apple never falls far from the tree” (see p. 49). For the English proverb I was able to show that it was loan translated from the German “Der Apfel fällt nicht weit vom Stamm”; see the chapter “‘The Apple Doesn’t Fall Far from the Tree’: History of a German Proverb in the Anglo-American World” in my book *Strategies of Wisdom: Anglo-American and German Proverb Studies* (Baltmannsweiler: Schneider Verlag Hohengehren, 2000), pp. 109-144. Halis Gözpinar is correct in claiming that these proverbs “provide an interesting and informative source of folk knowledge with their highly communicative and instructive value helping parents solve and understand the situations of conflict and stating what should, or should not be done and show conditions for certain actions and attitudes” (pp. 61-62). Of course, all these wonderful texts and analyses make it abundantly clear that while there are some cultural and metaphorical differences, there are plenty of similarities when it comes to parents and children. People are really not as different when it comes to basic human emotions and behavior as it is claimed at times.

The fourth chapter presents an “Analysis of Georgian and Turkish English Teachers’ Attitudes Towards Teaching and Learning Proverbs” (pp. 64-98). This is truly an enlightening chapter based on an impressive questionnaire filled out by 177 school teachers from the cities Ordu, Turkey (57), Akhaltsikhe, Georgia (58), and Tbilisi Georgia (62). The statistical analysis of the rich data is indeed unique, giving answers to what attitudes these teachers of English as a foreign language might have towards the learning and teaching of English proverbs, what they think about their own knowledge of English proverbs, and what practice they follow in teaching English proverbs in the classroom. The design of the questionnaire is highly impressive, and so is the high rate of meaningful and significant responses from the teachers. There is no need for me to summarize the findings, but be it said that the statistics and the presentation of the data in pie charts is effectively and clearly done. It is interesting to note that while plenty of teachers consider teaching proverbs of importance and that it is advantageous for them and their students to be knowledgeable about proverbs, there is the understandable worry that they as teachers are not properly educated in teaching proverbs. I am quite certain that similar studies in other countries would equal these results, but it is Halis Gözpinar who has the figures to show and prove that while there is plenty of interest among teachers and students to teach and learn about proverbs, they lack the effective pedagogical skills and necessary teaching materials to do so. For example, 72% of the teachers feel that proverbs should be included in English textbooks (p. 77). I might add here that I once showed in a small study that American textbooks written for teachers of German in the United States included only few proverbs (if at all), and hardly any exercises; see my article “Deutsche Sprichwörter im amerikanischen Sprachunterricht,” *Unterrichtspraxis*, 26 (1993), 13-21. In any case, the invaluable statistics that Halis Gözpinar has assembled after painstaking and time-consuming work will now form the

basis for an improvement of this unfortunate situation in foreign language pedagogy no matter what the target language might be. The facts are clear, and educators can now work on preparing teachers better for the obvious necessity of integrating some proverbial materials into the foreign language teaching and learning curriculum.

Being the good and experienced teacher that Halis Gözpinar doubtlessly is, he practices what he preaches by way of his large fifth chapter on “Developing Foreign Language Skills and Intercultural Awareness of Young Students by Teaching Proverbs in English, Georgian and Turkish Languages” (pp. 99-176). In other words, he moves from the theoretical, statistical, and interpretive realm to the practical, pragmatic, and educational implementation of his significant findings. He presents a wealth of possible teaching materials and classroom activities, and I have already discussed some of them with our language instructors here at the University of Vermont. I shall also provide this chapter in particular to instructors who teach English as a Second Language to our many foreign students from Africa, Asia, Europe, and South America. Halis Gözpinar is correct in arguing that teachers first of all need to become aware of what proverbs really are and represent, why they are important as linguistic and cultural icons, and what effect they have in communicative contexts of various types. He thus presents definitions, explains the style and structure of proverbs, and demonstrates the various possible meanings of a proverb in different oral or written contexts. He also shows that the metaphors of proverbs can be translated into drawn pictures, an exercise that students will most certainly enjoy, especially once they realize that proverbs are verbal pictures! Next he deals with translation difficulties of proverbs, explaining various levels of equivalencies from one language to another. And, very appropriately, there is also a sub-section on identity and worldview expressed in proverbs that will add to a better understanding of cultural and historical peculiarities. This is followed by a multitude of possible exercise, including grammatical matters, vocabulary building, conceptual significance, syntactical issues, etc. There are also proverb completion exercises, and students will delight in completing the proverb crosswords. My favorite part is the sub-section on “Visualizing Proverbs for Intercultural Competence” (pp. 132-138) with wonderful illustrations drawn by the young students – for example for the proverbs dealing with pears or apples falling from the tree (p. 136). There are dozens upon dozens of examples, and Halis Gözpinar now also address the teaching of proverbs at the university level (starting on p. 138). I know that I have done similar things when I taught advanced German classes to students at the beginning of my university career. But I could have benefitted greatly if Halis Gözpinar had written his masterful dissertations more than thirty years ago! It also needs to be stated that Halis Gözpinar has conducted actual field research in language classes testing his hypotheses and results. He includes fantastic comparative data for proverbs about money (pp. 150-

154) and advice (pp. 154-156), and he shows how proverbs can be practiced in writing and speaking situations. They can be explained in stories, they can be acted out, and they can be drawn. As the modern American proverb states, when it comes to the use of proverbs, “The sky is the limit”.

As one would expect, the thesis includes a valuable explanatory but succinct list of “Conclusions and Recommendations” (pp. 177-185) as far as the necessity and importance of integrating proverbs into the foreign language teaching curriculum is concerned. And Department of Education at universities should certainly get acquainted with these findings and hopefully make sure that future teachers get the appropriate training in how to teach about proverbs as intercultural signs. The list of “References” (pp. 186-190) indicates that Halis Gözpinar is well acquainted with international proverb scholarship and certainly also with the secondary literature on foreign language teaching. I might point out the seminal article on “The Perception of Proverbiality” (p. 189) was not written by A. Shirley but rather by Shirley Arora. Having mentioned this, let me state that Halis Gözpinar’s command of the English language is truly amazing and exceptional. I believe I might have found 4 or five typing errors, too miniscule to bother with here. From a purely stylistic, grammatical, and orthographical point of view, this is one of the most perfectly submitted dissertations that I have evaluated during the past forty-five years. Congratulations to Halis Gözpinar on this linguistic accomplishment, making it a pleasure to read his multifaceted findings.

It is good that the actual questionnaire (pp. 190-195) is included as the first part of an invaluable Appendix section. Appendix 2 summarizes all the statistics one more time (pp. 196-204), proving at one glance that Halis Gözpinar’s entire thesis is based on solid research with quantitative and qualitative analysis by an experienced scholar and a first-class teacher! Appendix 3 (pp. 205-240) is absolutely fantastic in that it presents 52 delightful drawings of proverbs by the students. This reminds me of the time when some years ago I teamed up with an elementary school teacher to teach proverbs to fourth graders. We subsequently published a book on our experience and findings that included many charming pictures by the youngsters as well; see Wolfgang Mieder and Deborah Holms, *“Children and Proverbs Speak the Truth”: Teaching Proverbial Wisdom to Fourth Graders* (Burlington, Vermont: The University of Vermont, 2000). I am deeply touched that this book appears in Halis Gözpinar’s bibliography (p. 188), but I hasten to add that this book is no match to the dissertation under discussion here. Halis Gözpinar has gone far beyond our descriptive book by way of his innovative theoretical and pragmatic approach to the teaching of proverbs in foreign language classes in particular. Finally, Appendix 4 (pp. 241-255) with its “List of the Proverbs Used in Our Research” is also most welcome. The 294 Georgian, Turkish, and English proverbs

enumerated here are ample proof of the representative nature of the proverb corpus on which this remarkable comparative dissertation is based.

There is then no doubt that Halis Gözpinar's dissertation is a major scholarly contribution to foreign language pedagogy, paremiology, and the ever more important teaching of intercultural awareness by way of proverbs. The work definitely has added much new knowledge to proverbial pedagogy, and Halis Gözpinar has dealt with his hypotheses in a most convincing fashion, employing various theoretical frameworks to draw invaluable conclusions about the necessity of including knowledge about proverbs in the preparation of teachers and thereby enabling them in turn to be effective teachers of this intercultural wisdom about human nature. As I have already stated, the dissertation is based on a clear and logical methodology, and all the important findings are presented in truly impressive English free of any jargon. Throughout the dissertation it is clear that Halis Gözpinar is deeply immersed in the linguistic, paremiological, and pedagogical scholarship related to his study, and he is well aware of the broader significance of his findings, arguing convincingly that educators and their students need to pay more attention to the ubiquitous proverbs in a world that ties people together in part by way of the English *lingua franca* and the proverbial wisdom that abounds in all languages and cultures.

Permit me to close my review by thanking the colleagues of Tbilisi State University for entrusting me with this task. You have every reason to be proud of your Ph.D. student Halis Gözpinar, and I commend and applaud him for a scholarly job extremely well done. The dissertation is a major accomplishment and a significant addition to international scholarship. It definitely deserves the laudatory designation "summa cum laude"!

Respectfully submitted,
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